

HISTORY OF SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA

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Suffolk is the only City in the bounds of Nansemond County. Its history goes back to colonial days. The site was owned by Daniel Sullivan, Sr., Burgess in 1702 and Clerk of the Court, 1702-3, heired by Daniel Sullivan, Jr., and then descended to his daughters, Margaret, wife of Jethro Sumner and Bridget, wife of William Sumner. It was a populous community before the town was established as the preamble to the Act passed May 1742 shows. It is given as follows:- "Forasmuch as it hath been represented unto this General Assembly that a good number of people have lately settled themselves at and near a place called Constance's Warehouse, on the east side of Nansemond river in the county of Nansemond, where the public warehouses are built; which place is healthful, commodious, and convenient for traders to cohabit in, and bring their goods to, and that in case a town were laid out there, trade and navigation would be greatly encouraged and increased."

Then the Act follows to establish the Town to be called Suffolk. The fifty acres of land for the town site was to be bought from Jethro Sumner and his wife, Margaret and was to be vested in a board of trustees composed of the following:- Lemuel Riddick, William Baker, William Wright, Edward Wright, John Gregory, Mills Riddick and Edward Norfleet. Gent. The price paid for the land was three pounds per acre, and it was to be divided into lots not to exceed one half an acre, and the trustees were to provide a place for a market, and a quay and wharves and cranes were to be built. Each purchaser had within two years from the date of his purchase to erect a house on his lot not less than 16 by 24 and 8 feet pitch or the lot reverted back to the trustees. All this happened while George the Second was King of England, Sir William Gooch was Governor of Virginia and Lemuel Riddick and --- Baker represented Nansemond County in the House of Burgesses at Williamsburg. Thomas Milner, County Surveyor laid out the town on the neck between the two creeks, and Milner Street is named for him. Mahan, the other cross street was named for Admiral Mahan, U. S. N.

We give here a few of the families living around the place when the Act was passed. Jethro Sumner lived on the site, the Constance home was just to the east on Cedar Hill, the original house having been torn down within the past few years, east of that was the home of the Allens, and north of that was the Bernard home, the Pughs lived at Jericho run, the Riddicks lived a little southeast of the site. Culloden's farm was on the south, and the Meads lived on the west, while the Marches and Jordans lived in the vicinity.

No doubt, there was a rolling house established in the vicinity about 1712, and continued until 1730 when it became a regular tobacco warehouse, and the trade that had been drawn to the place had attracted many people to the neighborhood.

The houses were small at first, and some even had wooden chimneys as bricks were scarce, many using rough stone in the place of brick, and some of these old stone underpinnings are still standing in the old part of the town, the Constance cellar being built of stone. To accommodate trade a ferry was established over the river in 1744, and in 1745 wooden chimneys were forbidden by law, and in 1750 they were ordered taken down by either the owner or the sheriff. In 1753 the parish church was built in the town, costing 595 pounds, and by 1755 the Court House and the Clerk's office had been located in the town, and the officials soon took up their residence in it. A large trade with the surrounding country and eastern North Carolina grew up, and ships were being built large enough to carry 300 hogshead of tobacco.

About 1760, the building of more permanent houses began, one built in 1768 stood until a few years ago on Main Street at the corner of Mahan. In 1722, goats and hogs were not allowed in the streets. About 1765 there was much trade from the Dismal Swamp passing through Suffolk, as all the products had to be brought to the river to be shipped. George Washington visited the new town many times while developing the company's lands in the Dismal Swamp.

As soon as the Revolutionary War began, Suffolk became a military depot and large quantities of stores were gathered in the warehouses and on the banks of the river and creeks. Col. Scott and Major Marshall were sent to

Suffolk in command of the military forces there, while Col. Woodford with a larger force came to Suffolk via Great Bridge. Many volunteer cavalry-men joined them in Suffolk. Lt. Edward Allen of Suffolk was an officer in the command.

Suffolk by its position was the logical place to assemble stores for the army and navy of the state, and in May 1779 as much as 8000 barrels of tar, pitch, turpentine and much rum and brandy with 9000 barrels of salt pork together with other valuable military stores were in the town awaiting shipment, and these were all destroyed by the British when they raided and burned the town on May 13th of that year. Much other provisions were destroyed at the home of Col. Willis Riddick near Suffolk as he was packing pork for the army at his home. Suffolk was visited by Gen. Tarleton in 1780 with British troops and the place continued to be visited by troops until the surrender at Yorktown.

Several years were required to rebuild the town after the war, but it recovered rapidly and it was visited by Smith, an English traveler in 1784 who wrote a description of it. In 1784, new trustees were appointed for the town and it became a port of entry for American built vessels with a surveyor in charge. Solomon's Lodge A. F. & A. M. was chartered in 1790 and held their first meeting in the home of Lempsy Copeland. About 1794 the Jericho canal was opened and for more than a generation this brought a great amount of business to the town, and was one of the main sources of revenue. In 1800, an ice company began to put up ice in the winter for summer use, and they tried to introduce ice in the West Indies. The next year, the old colonial church was torn down, and a rough frame building, neither plastered nor ceiled, was erected on Cedar Hill. This was known as the Union Church and was used by all denominations in the town for services.

In 1808, the town was more formerly incorporated, and a new board of trustees was appointed. In the War of 1812, the town was not visited by the British but received one scare when a large fleet of oyster boats was coming up the river as it was thought to be a British fleet. The militia was around Craney Island. In 1815, a new Clerk's Office was built. The population of the town in 1820 was about 1000 and all the business was done around what is now the wharf section.

The trade was mostly in barter for tar, staves, shingles, pork, beef, black-eye peas, with some flour and tobacco, and the people bought sugar, coffee, molasses, gunpowder, flints, hoes and axes, jugs, iron pots and spiders, grindstones and rum.

February 26th, 1825, Gen. Lafayette visited the town, and was officially received with much ceremony, and spent the night, while in the Southampton insurrection of 1831, the town was greatly disturbed. In 1833 Suffolk had 300 houses, 20 general stores, 4 churches, 5 grammar schools, 2 lawyers and 2 doctors.

In 1837, the town was visited by a destructive fire, practically destroying the entire town, after which the town moved nearer to the present center, and the old part became a residential section. In 1845 it had about 1200 inhabitants. In 1849, the first newspaper was started, The Suffolk Intelligencer, by John R. Kilby, and the first telegram was passed through Suffolk. The Southron, a newspaper, by D. J. Godwin began in 1850, and in 1852 The Nansemond Inquirer and The District Republican began, and in 1855, The Christian Sun was bought and moved to Suffolk by Rev. W. B. Wellons.

In 1858, there was a slave market where R. W. Baker and Company's store now stands, and that year a Mayor and Council were elected, the vote in which is extant. The Suffolk Savings Bank was established.

In 1859, the first bank building in the town was erected on Main Street at the head of Bank Street, and the Norfolk and Petersburg railroad was completed. 1861, Town Bonds were first mentioned. The war came on and Suffolk became a training camp for troops from Georgia and South Carolina. It was evacuated by the Confederates in 1862, and the next day Col. Dodge's New York Cavalry rode into the town, and it was surrendered by the Mayor, Benjamin Riddick. Gen. Peck was soon in command of the town, and in 1863 while Gen. Longstreet's seige of Suffolk was going on, there were around 60,000 Federal troops in the place. The war map of Suffolk at that time is extant. In July 1863, it was evacuated by the Federals, and only about 300 people were left in the town. From that time on, there were several small encounters in and around the town, the one with Gen. Ransom's command being the most important. In 1965, a provisional government was set up for the state and courts began to be held.

In 1866, the Clerk's Office with all of the records of the county was burned.

In 1869, the Farmer's Bank of Nansemond was organized, largely through the work and influence of Dr. William B. Wellons and his friends. This grew rapidly under Col. John R. Copeland and William H. Jones, Jr.

In 1871, the public school system began, and Suffolk's school board was composed of John R. Kilby, E. B. Britt and William D. McClenney, and R. L. Brewer, Sr., was Superintendent of the county and town. Schools were run three months, there being 186 white and 141 colored children of school age in the town.

In 1872, a new charter was granted providing for town officers, Sergeant, Clerk, Assesor, Treasurer, Overseer of the Poor and Street Commissioner.

In 1873, The Suffolk Herald began, the Commercial Bank opened and a tannery was built on Spring Street. The next year, public schools ran four months.

In 1878 the Suffolk Grays (military company) was organized. This company continued and entered the Spanish War in 1898, May 14th, and the World War in April 1917. In 1879, the limits of the town were enlarged. The first Town Hall and Market house was built on the corner of Main and Market Streets. In 1881, the Suffolk Cotton Mills was built, and the S. A. L. Depot was erected. About 1885, Lake Kilby was purchased as a water supply for Portsmouth, Berkley and Suffolk. In June, Suffolk was visited by a most destructive fire, the entire business district being burned. A steamboat line to Norfolk was established that year, and the Baker building was erected. By 1886, the lumber business had around \$1,000,000.00 invested in it in Suffolk and Suffolk became a lumber center. Totals town bonds out \$7000.00 and the tax rate was 71 cents. Another great fire visited Suffolk in August 1888 and practically wiped out the business section again.

In 1889, the First National Bank of Suffolk was opened, and the Law Building was erected. In 1890, there were 697 children of school age in the town. The first electric light plant was begun. In 1891, street car tracks began to be laid in the town. About this time, the present Market and Town Hall

was erected. The County Clerk's Office was built in 1894, and the next year the first telephone exchange was opened, and The Weekly Observer began about that time. In 1898, the Suffolk Grays and the Suffolk Light Infantry companies left Suffolk for Camp Lee, Richmond, and May 14th and 15th. The Bank of Suffolk was organized in 1899.

From the beginning of the present century, Suffolk has taken on new life and has had a wonderful growth.) New factories have been established and the old ones have increased their capacity until today it is the largest peanut market in the world, and the products of its factories and shops are sent to practically all of the world. (The town became a City on October 1st, 1910, and since that time it has had its own officers and courts, and the next year the U. S. Post Office building was begun.) Two banks, the American Bank & Trust Company and the Phoenix Bank of Nansemond, a colored institution, have been established, and The Suffolk News Herald, a daily paper has been established, and the school facilities of the City have greatly improved by the erection of five large buildings. The three white bank buildings have been erected in the business district, and the large plant of the Planters Nut & Chocolate Company is one of the largest industrial plants in the state. The fire department has been enlarged and improved, and now has the most modern equipment. The streets have been graded and paved, while the churches have all rebuilt and modernized. The water system has been improved and light system of the town is one of the best in the state, while the gas system supplies the homes with light and heat. Many large modern and large homes have been erected in the same time. The sewer system has been enlarged until it now covers practically the entire city.

2425 in School